United Nations E/CN.5/2012/NGO/25

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
18 November 2011

Original: English

Commission for Social Development
Fiftieth session
1-10 February 2012
Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: poverty eradication

Statement submitted by Howard Center for Family, Religion and Society, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.5/2012/1.

11-60059 (E) 121211

Please recycle

Statement

The Howard Center for Family, Religion and Society applauds that the priority theme for the fiftieth session of the Commission for Social Development is poverty eradication. It also applauds the Commission as it moves ahead on its review of relevant United Nations plans and programmes of action pertaining to the situation of social groups, including families, and on its review of the report of the Secretary-General on the preparations for observance of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family at all levels (A/66/62-E/2011/4).

We are convinced that optimum solutions for poverty eradication will become possible only by recognizing the fundamental role played by the family in all such efforts. In 2004, the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, Secretary-General Kofi Annan declared that families have major, albeit often untapped potential to contribute to national development and to the achievement of major objectives of every society and of the United Nations, including the eradication of poverty and the creation of just, stable and secure societies (see A/59/176). Also in 2004, he declared that the family is a vital partner in efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and the many other objectives set by the international community during the last decade (see A/59/PV.67).

The family's importance to development was also explained in 2004 by members of the African Union in its plan of action on the family in Africa. In that document, it was asserted that, in Africa, due to its multiple roles and functions, the centrality, uniqueness and indispensability of the family in society is unquestionable. For generations, the family has been a source of strength for guidance and support, thus providing members with a wide circle of relatives on whom they can fall back. In times of crisis, unemployment, sickness, poverty, old age and bereavement, most people rely on the family as the main source of material, social and emotional support and social security. Therefore, the African family network is the prime mechanism for coping with social, economic and political adversity in the continent

For the African Union, the family remains the touchstone of all successful development. Recognition that the family is the basic and most fundamental unit of society, a dynamic unit engaged in an intertwined process of individual and group development, justifies the need to place the African family at the core of society which needs to be strengthened as part of Africa's development process. The family continues to play a crucial role in Africa's development, and development efforts that are family-centred are essential to sustainable socio-economic development. It is imperative that the African family be well positioned to play a crucial role in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals.

Nor is the family's pivotal role in development restricted to Africa. Maria Sophia Aguirre, Associate Professor from the Department of Business and Economics of the Catholic University of America, has asked whether the family is relevant for economic development. In her answer, she says that data from across countries and sciences seem to clearly suggest that the family should be the point of reference if sustainable development is to be achieved. This is not because the family is a problem to economic development — it is the solution. It is within the family where human, moral and social capital, all essential conditions for an economy to develop, are either encouraged and nurtured or hampered. Children

develop best within a family that is functional, that is, with a mother and a father in a stable marriage. This means that the family is a necessary good for economic development and should therefore be promoted and protected if sustainable development is to be achieved. At the same time, data across sciences also show that the breakdown of the family damages the economy and the society since human, moral and social capital is reduced and social costs increased.

In short, the important goals of poverty eradication and family strengthening must not be approached in isolation. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State. In the words of eminent historian Will Durant, "the family is the ultimate foundation of every civilization known to history".

We believe that the greatest success in poverty eradication will come as development efforts focus on strengthening the family as the fundamental unit of society.